

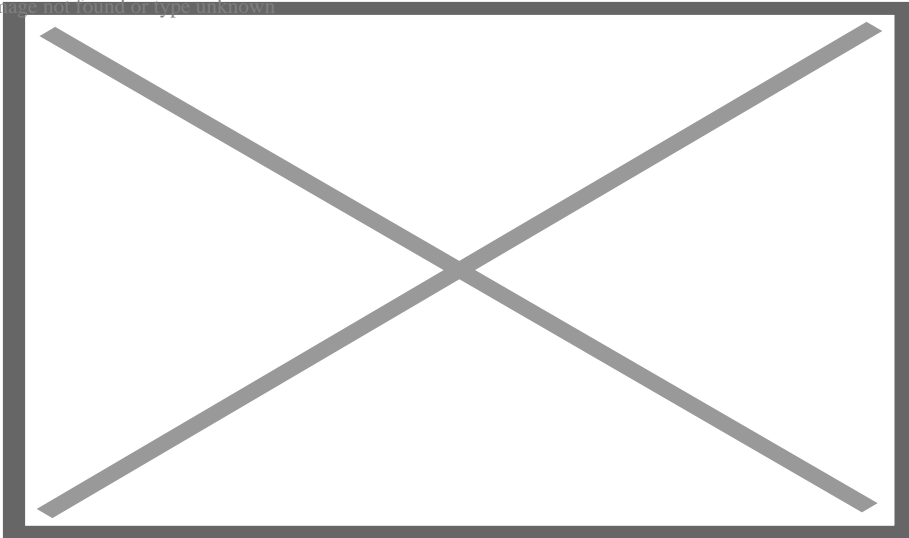
More Details Emerge Behind Washington's Decision To Leave INF Treaty

Description

[Authored by Andrei Akulov via The Strategic Culture Foundation,](#)

The US [announced its withdrawal](#) from the INF Treaty without having an intermediate ground-based missile to deploy. **It made arms control pundits wonder what triggered this decision.** Even if the China threat were not exaggerated and Russia's alleged "treaty violations" were true, there would be no explanation for National Security Adviser John Bolton's statement that **the US was leaving the landmark agreement with no land-based intermediate range weapon of its own nearing operational status.**

Image source: [foundry press unknown](#)



Picking up useful bits of information here and there is the best way to find answers to hard questions. It takes time but the effort pays off.

[According to](#) the US Naval institute (USNI), the Navy has set up a program office within its Strategic Systems Programs (SSP) to address the conventional [prompt global strike](#) mission handed by the Defense Department to the sea service. **According to SSP Director Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, who spoke this month at the annual Naval Submarine League symposium, each service will field some sort of hypersonic capability to contribute to conventional prompt global strike.**

"We have a program, we are funded, and we're moving forward with that capability, which is going to be tremendous to allow our Navy to continue to have the access they need, whether it be from submarines or from surface ships," the admiral noted.

The sea service is to spearhead the effort by developing the hypersonic glide body that all the services will use. The platforms are yet to be determined as the Navy is intentionally keeping its options open.

The idea is to have a booster going up to the upper atmosphere or outer space and a hypersonic glide vehicle able to maneuver while descending to defy air defenses and strike moving targets. **With [the Avangard operational](#), Russia is the only country to have such a weapon today.**

Unlike the US Air Force, **the Navy has been doing its research in high hush-hush mode during a number of years.** The first conventional global strike missile test to collect data on hypersonic boost-glide technologies [was conducted](#) by the service on October 30, 2017. Initially, it was planned to be held [till the end of 2016](#) but had to be postponed. The glider flew about 2,000 nautical miles (3,800 km) from the Hawaii to the Marshall Islands fired from a ground-based launcher. The \$160 million test was a success. The Navy could eventually deploy the conventional strike system on either Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines that have been converted to launch cruise missiles (known as SSGNs) or Virginia-class attack submarines equipped the Virginia payload module.

The DOD budget request for FY2019 indicates that it will [conduct a second flight test](#) by the end of FY2020. The funding for the program goes to the Navy. The Congressional Research Service [report](#) says, **“The funding for the program is expected to increase significantly, from a request for \$278 million in FY2019 to a request for \$478 million in FY2022, for a total of \$1.9 billion between FY2019 and FY2022. This is more than twice the amount expected over a five-year period in the FY2018 budget request.”**

If attack submarines can accommodate the weapon, US Navy's destroyers and cruisers can do it too. One can imagine the number of sea-based PGS weapons in service when mass production process starts running smoothly.

Installed on Virginia-class boats, the missile will be excluded from the verification procedures in accordance with the New START Treaty. The weapon under consideration is a sea-based one. At first glance it has no relation to the INF Treaty but not so fast. The Defense Department said the Navy is responsible for a universal weapon to be used by all services, including the Army. The Hawaii missile was launched from land.

It's worth to note that by announcing the plans to arm attack submarines with the new weapon the US military actually admits the violation of the INF Treaty because the Romania-based Aegis Ashore uses the same VLS Mk-41 launching pad as ships and submarines. If the PGS weapon is small enough for the MK-41 launcher, or the Virginia Payload Module, it can be installed on a mobile ground platform in open violation of the INF Treaty.

The range of 2,000 nautical miles allows the PGS system to cover most of Russia's territory, reaching as far as the Arctic archipelago of Novaya Zemlya or the Siberian city of Omsk, about 2,700 km east from Moscow. Deployed in Japan, the land-based version of the weapon can also threaten China, provided Tokyo gave consent. On July 30, Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera announced a plan to deploy the Aegis Ashore missile-defense system by 2023. The military training grounds in the Akita and Yamaguchi prefectures are prospective sites.

This is a threat for China and Russia. With the Mk-41 used, one can never tell what missile is going to be launched – an interceptor or a prompt global strike missile reaching as far as Russian [Primorski Krai](#) (Primorye), the Kamchatka Peninsula where the Pacific Fleet SSBNs are based, and Krasnoyarsk, the third-largest city in Siberia, where Russia plans to deploy its new silo-based heavy

ballistic [Sarmat](#) missiles. With all only land-based deployments in place, the entire Russian territory will be covered by US PGS weapons. Add to it the naval and aircraft-based PGS component. One can only imagine how strong will be the temptation to deliver a first strike to knock out Russia's key infrastructure and strategic nuclear weapons sites, leaving the US strategic nuclear arsenal intact! The missile [might have delivered](#) a 2,000- pound payload over a 1,500-mile range, 80 with an accuracy of less than 5 meters. This would allow it to reach its target in less than 15 minutes. The payload is enough to fulfill the mission. True, the increased 2,000 nautical miles range will require a less powerful warhead but the US is working on a [low-yield nuclear weapon](#).

As a result, the strategic balance will be tilted in US favor to give it the advantage of first conventional strike. Moscow will not watch idly. The [weapons](#) President Putin talked about in March were a response to US land- and air-based intermediate range advantage. Russia will do it again, if it needs to catch up. With the INF Treaty no longer valid, an unfettered arms race will start and there is [no guarantee](#) the US will be the winner. It has already started.